



Natural Resources Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture

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NEWS RELEASE

NRCS STATE CONSERVATIONIST ANNOUNCES SIGNUP FOR RECOVERY OF FORESTED WILDLIFE HABITAT

Jackson, Mississippi, June 13, 2006—Homer Wilkes, Mississippi State Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) today announced a new program to improve forested wildlife habitat for threatened and endangered species in 14 counties located in the declining Longleaf pine ecosystem.

“The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP), authorized by the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, is a voluntary program established for the purpose of restoring and enhancing forest ecosystems to promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species, improve biodiversity and enhance carbon sequestration” said Wilkes.

Mississippi is one of three States selected to receive funding for HFRP, which is being implemented in fiscal year 2006 as a “pilot” program in coordination between NRCS and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

To be eligible for enrollment, lands must be privately owned. Interested landowners must develop a forest management restoration plan that includes the implementation of conservation practices necessary to restore and enhance forested habitat for selected species listed as threatened or endangered, candidate species for listing, or State species of special concern. NRCS will provide technical assistance to help participants develop and implement their HFRP forest management restoration plans.

Three enrollment options will be available to eligible landowners: a 10-year cost-share agreement where the landowner may receive 50 percent of the cost of approved conservation practices, a 30-year easement where the landowner may receive 75 percent of the easement value of

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the enrolled land plus 75 percent of the cost of approved habitat conservation practices, or an easement of not more than 99 years where the landowner may receive 100 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus the cost of approved habitat conservation practices.

“Landowner Protections” will be made available to HFRP participants who agree, for a specified period, to restore or improve their land for threatened or endangered species habitat so that there is a net conservation benefit to the species. In exchange, the program participant will avoid future regulatory restrictions on the use of that land protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Eligible private forest landowners in Covington, Jones, Wayne, Marion, Lamar, Forrest, Perry, Greene, Pearl River, Stone, George, Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson Counties may complete an application for HFRP at local NRCS field offices. Office information is located at: www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov/contact under Mississippi locator. Applications received by July 7, 2006 will be prioritized according to ranking criteria that promote the recovery of habitat for gopher frog, gopher tortoise, and black pine snake. However, in order to gauge program interest, applications will be accepted through July 31, 2006, but those applications will only be prioritized if funding is available. Additional information on HFRP is available at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/HFRP/ProgInfo/HFRPPProgramInfo.html>.

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